

new life, here, with him. She chose the latter. She had no fear of the Germans. When they came, she was confident, Vladislav would achieve his career. He had every necessary quality.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Germans were infuriated by the attempt on Smakovsky, during which one of the soldiers accompanying him was wounded. Evidently, there was an underground organization in the town, swift to strike and fearless of reprisals. Searches and arrests began throughout the town.

For some days, Krainev was forgotten. He stayed at home, living on canned goods and vanilla rusks, which Irina had stored up in incredible quantities, and eating his heart out over his enforced inactivity and the uncertainty of his position.

The ammonite walled up in the cable channel haunted his dreams and his waking thoughts. There were moments when he felt he had been wrong not to speak over the radio. Had he spoken, his prime task, the destruction of the power station, would have become easier of achievement. His failure to speak must, of course, have set the Germans against him, thus imperilling all his

plans. Again, there was the danger of exposure by Pivovarov. Bitterly, Krainev realized his utter helplessness.

Not until four days after the radio incident was Krainev summoned to the Kommandantur. Walking down the street beside the orderly who had been sent for him, he wondered: was the orderly there to protect him, or to guard him?

In these four days, his decision to seize upon every possible means for the destruction of the power station had strengthened into firm and unshakable resolution. The restoration of electric lighting in the town, and the Germans' boasting promises, over the radio, to restore the works in quick time, had still further stimulated his desire for action.

Colonel Pfaul received him coldly. Twisting his thick lips into a contemptuous grimace, he enquired:

"Are you today not drunken?"

The Kommandant was not alone. Beside him at the desk sat another German, with close-cropped hair, whom Krainev had not seen before. There was something reminiscent of the predatory pike about this German's face, with its wide, thin-lipped slit of a mouth, and long, thin nose.

Receiving no reply to his first question, the colonel asked:

"Do you knowing what iss happen after the radio broadcast?"

Krainev nodded. The colonel went on:

"We are decite to make quick an end from this things. We shoot today on the market place ten arrestanten. After, for every German soldat will we shoot twenty Russians. You are shoot fery gut, und I am decite to make you pleasure. You will be for the cinema photographed. A fery interesting cinema. You will come?"

Sergei Petrovich was stiff with horror. He had come here firmly determined to agree to any proposal that might help him achieve his aim. But this—this went far beyond his worst expectations.

Pfaul was watching searchingly; but not a muscle quivered in Krainev's face.

"Why, yes, of course I'll come," he replied, hoping thus to gain time for thought.

The colonel glanced at his slit-mouthed neighbour, in evident satisfaction. Pulling a watch from his pocket—a massive gold watch, with a Russian monogram on the case—he said:

"Now iss two o'clock. To four o'clock must you be here, but not late und not trunken."

Pfaul was not so simple as he seemed, by far. Evidently, his suspicions had been aroused, and he was now verifying them, putting Krainev to the final test for loyalty.

Leaving the Kommandantur, Sergei Petrovich moved slowly across the square and down one of the streets opening on it, determined not to return at the appointed hour. After some thought, however, he changed his mind. Yes, he would return to the Kommandantur. He would go with them to the market place. He would shoot—shoot at these fascist swine. Surely, before he was killed, he could manage to fire all the shots in his revolver. The power station would remain undestroyed; but he would have done his utmost. "What else could I expect?" he reflected sadly. "Senseless and useless extinction—that's what comes of trying to fight the Germans on your own."

Unquestionably, there must be an underground organization in the town. He should have gotten in touch with it, from the very first. But how? How could he have found its members?

In any case, it was too late now.

Sergei Petrovich glanced at his watch. It was half past two. At four, he would report to the Kommandantur. At five, he would be dead.

He drew a deep breath of the fresh autumn air. It smelled of dampness and decaying maple leaves.

A strange composure lulled his thoughts. Everything had been settled—had settled itself. There

was nothing more to puzzle over. No more need for haste. How stupidly life was to be cut short! Only so recently, there had been so much ahead. And the term of life to which he had once looked forward seemed suddenly infinite, unlimited, as compared with the few short hours that now remained.

He could picture clearly the scene at the market place.

Those who were to be shot, and those who were to shoot them. The stony ranks of the Hitlerites. The crowd of Soviet citizens, driven to the market place to witness the execution. A handful of officials, and among them potbellied Pfau and the lean, pike-faced German. At that handful he would discharge his revolver—no, his automatic rifle. He must be sure to ask for an automatic. A fine show for their cameramen, he'd give them!

Of course, they would not take him alive. But above all, he must get some bullets into them before he was killed.

"No fear," he said aloud. "They'll be too dumbfounded to move, at first."

Of what would follow, he did not want to think. His mind turned to other things.

Vadim! Krainev's heart contracted in pain and tender love. Never to see his son again! The

Makarovs, of course, would bring him up. The years would pass, and little Vadim would grow to manhood: Vadim Sergeyevich.

At any rate, no one could ever say to him that his father had been a traitor.

Again Sergei Petrovich looked at his watch. An hour and fifteen minutes still remained. Absently, he glanced up at a corner house to see what street he had turned into. Pervomaiskaya. He stopped short. This was the street where Valya lived.

"She would have understood. Why didn't I seek her out earlier?" he asked himself reproachfully. "It may not have been just her mother's illness that kept her here, but the resolve to fight the Germans in the underground. If I could see her now, and tell her about that ammonite charge at the power station! She'd know whom to tell, so the task I failed in would be carried out. Carried out by people working together, not single-handed, the way I tried to do."

Hastening his step, he soon reached Valya's house. All the windows were shuttered. No one answered his knock. He went around to the back; but the back door was boarded up. Obviously, Valya was no longer living here.

For some minutes he stood outside the door, at a loss what to do next. Then, turning sharply,

he went out to the street again and strode rapidly back towards the Kommandantur.

Coming into the square, he passed by a man sitting on a porch. He did not notice that the man got up and followed him, just a few paces behind.

Quite a number of Germans had gathered outside the Kommandantur. Pfaul stood at the front of the group, with the slit-mouthed man beside him. Touring cars were strung along the curb. A truck came rumbling down the driveway from the back. Automatic riflemen clung to its sides. Up in the body stood the condemned: an old man with long grey beard and moustache; a young woman in a woollen blouse, with a baby in her arms; two workers in grease-stained overalls, their faces stern and sombre. The rest were not to be seen. Evidently, too weak to stand, they were lying on the floor.

The truck stopped directly in front of the building. Noticing Krainev, Pfaul beckoned imperatively. Krainev walked faster. So did the man behind him. Suddenly, the man called Krainev by name. Sergei Petrovich stopped and stared at him, trying to remember where he had seen this tall, lanky figure—this elderly face, with the stubborn, bulging forehead and the firm lips, determinedly compressed.

Rapidly approaching, the stranger took out a cigarette, and began to slap his pockets, as though in search of matches. Then, when they were face to face, he whipped out a revolver and fired at Krainev point-blank.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The time came when they found themselves once more together: young Sasha, hollow-cheeked, but buoyed up by his old lively spirit; Opanasenko, gloomier than ever; Lutsenko, a gaunt skeleton, and Dyatlov, dull and depressed—all returned to the shop, though not all in the same manner. Valsky—now shop manager again, though the Germans called him simply “meister,” or foreman, and the Russians, more simply still, “lick-spittle”—had sent politsais to fetch Opanasenko, and, encountering Lutsenko in the street, had promptly collared him and dragged him to the works. Dyatlov had been caught in a roundup at the market place. Only Sasha had come voluntarily, by registering at the employment bureau. Sasha was thus in a position of privilege. As a “volunteer,” he lived at home from the first, coming in only to work, while the others were kept in the shop day and night, under guard,

for a whole week, before the Germans would trust them out of sight.

The shop was changed beyond all recognition. The roof had been torn off by the explosions, and the roof girders and crane track girders, against the cheerless grey of the autumn sky, seemed to hover at an incredible height. Where the furnaces had stood loomed heaps of crumbled brick and twisted iron.

From morning to night, they pottered about in the rubbish that was left of No. 1 furnace. For this work, each received a bowl of soup and three hundred grams of something called bread, baked of unknown ingredients, heavy as clay and coarse as oilcake.

That day, the visit of the authorities brought even more unpleasantness than usual.

Sonderführer Geiss, a tall, narrow-shouldered German, kicked over the portable iron stove at which the workers had been trying to warm up. The stove tumbled onto Sasha's legs, setting his overalls on fire, and it was only with difficulty that the flame was beaten down. Geiss cursed them all for "Bolsheviks." He shouted interminably, both at the workers and at "meister" Valsky; and when he paused for breath, the "meister" carried on. Out of the flood of words, the workers comprehended little except that sitting down

was not allowed; smoking was not allowed; and those who did their work badly would get no bread.

As soon as Valsky and the German were gone, all four, as though by tacit consent, set to work rolling cigarettes. There was plenty to smoke, for Sasha brought in a whole potful of dry horse dung every morning. "Horselegs," the manure cigarettes were called.

"Damn idiots we were," Opanasenko muttered harshly, drawing the thick, acrid smoke deep into his lungs.

"Idiot yourself," Dyatlov returned, rolling a second horseleg. "I was all ready to go, and then you had to butt in, with your 'whys' and 'where tos.' And here's 'where to' for you!"

The others laughed cheerlessly.

"What are you grumbling about, anyway, Ipolit Yevstigneyevich? You haven't lost anything," said Lutsenko, with a caustic grin. "Your house is still there, and all your junk inside it. You stayed to take care of your belongings. Well, go ahead and take care of 'em!"

"What do you mean—I haven't lost anything?" cried Opanasenko. "My quality, that's what I've lost. My good name. Like an ingot that's got left behind the rest of the tap. Who can tell what it is—good steel, or spoilage? When our

folks come back, they'll want to know: 'Comrade head foreman, why did you stay behind?' No, they won't call me comrade. 'What sort of comrade are you?' they'll say. 'We disabled the shop, and you repaired it. We fought the Germans, at the front and in the shops and plants. And you helped the Germans.'"

He flung away the butt of his cigarette, as though it were to blame.

"Yes," Dyatlov said drearily. "That's about how it looks. Take Dmitryuk. One foot in the grave, and just the same he left. Even Vasya Buroi left, and we all know the kind he is. Rowing over everything on earth! If the quotas were revised, he'd yell they were too big. When pay day came, he'd yell he got too little—fifteen hundred rubles wasn't enough to suit him. At dinner hour, he'd yell that the soup was thin, or the bread not baked right. Getting on the train, even, he yelled, because the best place wasn't reserved for him. And yet, he left—and we stayed on."

"He'll row over everything out there too," put in Sasha gloomily. Gingerly, he felt the burns on his legs.

"Of course he will," Lutsenko replied. "Only he's out there. Here, now—just try it! Take Steblev, yesterday—he just pointed to his belt

when Geiss went by, as if to say the eats were bad, and his belly was shrinking. And today—no Steblev! I hear he's in a camp now, behind barbed wire, under the open sky."

The wind whistled in the girders overhead, slapping the few scattered sheets that remained of the roof. A drizzling rain began to fall. Dyatlov shivered.

"If we could light a fire," he said.

"Try it," Lutsenko told him. "They'll warm you up fast enough. Didn't you hear lickspittle yelling? Work, and you'll be warm, he said. Only loafers freeze."

"Anyway, there was no chance for everyone to leave," Opanasenko mumbled, still absorbed in his own problem.

"No, not for everyone," Dyatlov returned. "But the ones that wanted to leave, did. And we stayed here, in the devil's own mess. All on account of you, you blasted fool!" He pointed accusingly at Opanasenko. "And now we have to work for the Germans!"

"You're a queer fellow, Ivan," said Lutsenko. "Real queer. Lived to old age, and none the wiser for it! You work and suffer—and I work and rejoice. Do you really think it's the Germans we're working for?"

"Who else?"

"Our own people! By the time we get this rubbish cleared away, they'll be marching back. Maybe sooner, even. And then we'll start rebuilding. Do you think the Germans can rebuild all this? Nothing doing! Specially, with us around. They won't ride far by harnessing us, I can tell you."

"Not far, you think?" asked Opanasenko, brightening.

"Of course not! They'll get off right where they started."

"It's not only the harness that's hell. There's the bridle too. And they've got that tight and strong. All we can do is wait till our own folks come back and pull it off. And when they do, they'll want to know: 'Why did you stay behind?'"

"What matters isn't who stayed behind, but how they acted," Sasha remarked philosophically.

"Yes, and you've acted just right!" grunted Opanasenko. "The rest of us couldn't help ourselves. They dragged us here. But you went running to their bureau, volunteering. A fine member of the Comsomol!"

Sasha sniffed offendedly, but held his tongue. The rain grew steadily heavier. Water trickled down Opanasenko's cap and under his collar. He shivered.

"Afraid of the Urals I was, on account of the frosts," he muttered, in a sort of self-flagellation. "At the furnaces it's warm enough, even in the Urals. Out there, they're working, making steel. Ah, when I remember—testing the steel. Dipping the spoon, and pouring out the metal. Maybe you'll laugh at me, but—well, it makes my mouth water, like the smell of good food. They're working, out there, and we...." He turned to indicate the heaped-up rubbish. "If we could only get the least little news from the front. If we could know how things are going. There's lots of talk in town, but how can you tell what's lies and what's the truth?"

Sasha looked up at him suddenly, with strangely searching eyes. Catching his glance, Opanasenko frowned.

"Keep your mouth shut, youngster," he said sharply. "Not a word about our talk, or you'll be sorry. See?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Resolving to remain in town, Valya Teplova had prepared her mind for capture, for concentration camp, for death. Only for one thing had she been unprepared: the torment of loneliness and inaction.

Her mother died. They buried her, Valya and Darya Vasilyevna, in the back yard, in a coffin they had made themselves, not very expertly, of the rotting boards of the garden fence. Darya Vasilyevna stayed for a few days, trying, through her own tears, to comfort Valya. All of Darya Vasilyevna's long life had been devoted to others: her husband, her children, then Valya's ailing mother. Loving Valya as a daughter, she now poured out on her all the warmth of her motherly heart.

At times, it seemed to Valya that she could have borne her grief more easily alone. Darya Vasilyevna reminded her too much of her mother: the same kind eyes, the same caressing hands, even the same manner of speaking; for, in their years of friendship, the two old women had unconsciously absorbed from one another many peculiarities of phrase and intonation.

Soon, however, Darya Vasilyevna went back to live in the Teplovas' house, which had been standing empty all these days. There was a large supply of coal there, still undiscovered by the Germans. Trudging out to the nearby villages with a sack of coal, the old woman would bring home, in exchange, now a pail of potatoes, now a supply of dried maize. She went always alone, refusing to take Valya with her lest the girl be seized by the Germans.

Now Valya saw Darya Vasilyevna only rarely, in the intervals between these foraging excursions. For the first time in her life, she was alone, entirely alone. Hunger sapped her strength. Her knees trembled, and her head swam. Yet how happy would she have been, had hunger been her only trial! Far worse was the fact that Maria did not come. This deprived her of all contact with the underground; for Valya had received strict orders, during their first meeting, not to show herself at Serdyuk's.

The shooting on the square, outside the Kommandantur, was a heavy blow. Valya did not believe that Krainev was a traitor. He had become the victim, she felt, of some fearful misunderstanding. But there came moments when she began to doubt; when she would shrink in horror, haunted by the face of that unknown comrade who had shot Krainev and then flung a hand grenade at the Germans. They had hung him, right there on the square. She alone, Valya felt, had been the cause of this comrade's death. Had she written to Krainev that day, everything would have turned out differently.

Gradually, she arrived at the conclusion that she must try to get across the front, as the only possible way out of her situation.

One evening, coming from the well with a

pail of water, Valya felt a light touch on her shoulder. She turned, and stopped short in amazement. It was Sasha—thin and ragged, but seeming cheerful enough nonetheless.

“Good evening, Valya,” he said, seizing her pail.

Silently, they went up the path and into the house.

Sasha sat down and looked around the bare, ugly room. He seemed quite satisfied with what he saw.

“Working anywhere, Valya?” he asked.

“Of course not! What a question!”

Looking earnestly into her worn face, with the dark circles under the eyes, he asked again:

“Then what do you eat?”

“Just about nothing.”

Sasha produced a hunk of bread, wrapped in a newspaper.

“Here, eat this,” he said, laying it down on the table.

Valya had had no food for two days, Darya Vasilyevna having been gone longer than usual. Taking the bread, Valya broke it in two and set one piece in front of Sasha.

“And you, Sasha?” she asked. “Are you working?”

He nodded. Valya put down her bread.

"Caught in a roundup?"

"No, I went to the employment bureau myself. If you don't go to work, you'll die of hunger, even sooner than you will working. And this is no time for dying. There are things a person can do. Isn't that so, Valya?"

He glanced at her significantly.

"It is, Sasha. Only—how?"

"Valya, I need your advice. I don't know how to go about things."

"I don't know either," she answered simply.

"I don't know. You don't know. He doesn't know," Sasha chanted softly. "In the singular, it's pretty bad. Let's try the plural. We don't know. You don't know. They—know! That sounds better! They do know, Valya, isn't that so?"

Valya understood. He did not believe that it was only her mother's illness that had kept her in town. He was confident that she, the leader of his Comsomol unit, must be connected with the underground. Always so unruly, so impatient of authority, the boy was now eager for advice and guidance.

It was a bitter pill; but she could not tell him what had happened. She did not have the right. And even had she been free to tell him, she would most probably not have done so.

She pretended that she did not grasp his meaning.

After a silence, he asked crisply:

"Do you get the communiqés?"

"Our communiqés? Sasha! Do you?"

He began to recite the latest news from the front, keeping as closely as he could to the terse style of the radio broadcasts. As he spoke, he saw her face change, her eyes light up.

And when, in conclusion, he pronounced impressively: "Soviet Information Bureau"—she sprang up and, throwing her arms around him, kissed him joyfully. Overcome with embarrassment, he sat stiffly on his chair, hiding his hands behind him for fear of soiling her blouse.

"How do you get it?"

"From a fellow I know."

"And he?"

"From a fellow he knows."

Valya bit her lip.

"Do you trust me, Sasha?" she asked.

Did he trust her? Of course he trusted her. And loved her, too, as an elder sister who had done much to make a man of him; as an elder comrade, at once solicitous and demanding. How often Valya had had to reprove him for his boyish pranks! At one time, she had actually given him up, and proposed his expulsion from the

Comsomol; but he tried to make him when the Committee, after his expulsion

"I trust myself. But honour, so you said, are you?"

"No, I'm

see how it is

"Well, the fellows have a tal set, how do about leave. There tried it. This morning, as they find remains are shot on the to put 'em

"Who What for?"

Sasha After

"Look, ber seventh

Comsomol; but afterwards, seeing how earnestly he tried to mend his ways, she had stood up for him when the question was discussed at the Town Committee, and, in view of her championship, his expulsion had not been confirmed.

"I trust you, Valya—trust you more than I do myself. But I've given my Comsomol word of honour, so you see how it is. You're not insulted, are you?"

"No, I'm not insulted," she said, smiling. "I see how it is."

"Well, then, here's the point, Valya. The fellows have a radio. Not a very good one: a crystal set, home made. Only we don't know what to do about leaflets. That's where we need your advice. There's no sense pasting them up. We've tried it. The politsais inspect the streets every morning, and scrape the leaflets off. And anyone they find reading 'em gets pulled in. And the Germans are even worse than the politsais. They just shoot on the spot. I was thinking maybe we ought to put 'em in people's mailboxes."

"Who ever looks in their mailboxes now? What for?"

Sasha hung his head shamefacedly.

After some reflection, Valya said:

"Look, Sasha—it's only three days to November seventh. There must be leaflets that day. And

not just dropped around in back yards, either. That may be all right for later on, but not for our holiday. We have to get them out on a mass scale, demonstratively—something people will remember. Not only our own people, but the Germans, too. Think, Sasha, boy! Try to think of something!"

Think as he might, however, Sasha could find no solution. Valya, sunk in thought, crinkled her forehead and bit her lips. Suddenly, she smiled.

"Got it?" he cried eagerly.

"No, Sasha, not yet," she answered, shaking her head. "Come around again tomorrow, at about this time. Perhaps I'll think of something by then."

Serdyuk opened the door to Valya's knock. For some time, he stood stiffly at the threshold, as though to block the way. Then, jerkily, he moved aside and let her in. Clearly, he had no desire to see her.

"I have news, Andrei Vasilyevich," Valya said, dropping into a chair, though he had not invited her to be seated. "There's a group of young people who have a radio. One of the boys came to me for advice. They don't know what to do about leaflets. I asked for a day to think it over.

and well, here I am. I must tell him something this evening."

Serdyuk put a few questions about Sasha, and then, in the same casual tone, enquired whether she had told the boy of her connection with the underground.

"How can you ask, Andrei Vasilyevich?" she cried indignantly. "What do you take me for?"

"What can I take you for, once you've refused to help us do away with a traitor?" Serdyuk returned, thinking it best to come openly to the point.

"I know Sergei Petrovich," Valya said. "I don't believe he's a traitor."

"You thought highly of Krainev, didn't you?" asked Serdyuk.

"Very. Both as my superior, and ... well, personally."

Softened by her straightforward reply, Serdyuk went on, more gently:

"Perhaps that's why you...."

"Perhaps," Valya broke in, flushing painfully. "I've thought and thought about it, asked myself over and over if it wasn't simply that. But I still think as I did. He wasn't intending to stay, I know. He sent his little boy East with our people. And he urged me to go, too. Sincerely. And then--

he stayed. There's something behind it that I can't make out. He was supposed to speak over the radio, but he didn't. You acted hastily, it seems to me."

Serdyuk was taken aback by the frank condemnation in her eyes.

"It wasn't our work," he said. "It was an act of individual terrorism. And, precisely for that reason, it was a failure. A life for a life is too dear a price to pay. None of the Germans got more than a few scratches. However, there's no good discussing it now. Time will show which of us was right."

He was silent for a while. Then he asked: "Do you want to help us?"

"Andrei Vasilyevich! Aren't you ashamed, to doubt me so? Since the day Comrade Kravchenko sent me to you, I belong entirely to the underground. But let's get back to those leaflets. Here's my plan."

And she explained to Serdyuk the idea which had struck her the day before.

"Are you sure it will work out technically?" he asked.

"Positive, Andrei Vasilyevich."

"Go to it, then. Only carefully! If it fails, come around again, and we'll try and think up something else."

When she had left, Serdyuk sat for a long time motionless, sunk in thought. He could not but admit to himself that he, too, lacked clarity in the matter of Krainev. A mysterious business!

On November seventh, the Germans redoubled their watchfulness. Patrols paced the streets, and fighter planes darted overhead all day.

Towards noon, the officer on duty burst into Pfaul's office, without knocking, and shouted:

“Leaflets!”

Pfaul shrugged his shoulders, frowning. This was nothing new. Leaflets appeared in every occupied Soviet town, and he had come to regard them as an inevitable evil.

“Where?” he asked composedly, glancing ironically up at the officer's frightened face.

“In the air! Dropping right out of the sky!”
Pfaul's eyebrows lifted.

“Tell me no children's tales,” he exclaimed angrily. But he got up and went out of doors to see for himself.

What the officer had told him was true.

Some minutes past, in broad daylight, leaflets had appeared over the town. At first, no one had noticed them. Fluttering across the bright blue of the cloudless sky, they had resembled a flock of soaring pigeons. Soon, however, many of them

had begun to sink slowly earthwards. Others flew steadily on, and it was impossible to tell where they would fall.

Hurrying back to his office telephone, Pfau ordered the entire town garrison brought out into the streets for patrol duty. This done, he sent for the head of the Russian police force, the politsais, and grilled him furiously, employing a choice selection of profanity.

Motorcycles sped through the town. Politsais snooped up and down the streets. But many of the leaflets dropped onto roofs, or into back yards. Hundreds of eyes followed their fall, and whenever possible they were caught up by active youngsters and carried home.

Pfau called for a leaflet. Soon a little heap of them lay on his desk: small sheets of paper, torn from pads and notebooks, covered on both sides with writing in round, childish hands. Over the text, a tiny red star; at the end, two letters: "T. C."

Turning them over and over, Pfau felt a sudden superstitious fear. Where did they come from? Who had sent them down from the autumn sky?

No Soviet planes had passed over the town. The leaflets came as though materializing out of thin air, out of the cool East wind.

One of the leaflets fell straight into the Opanasenkos' back yard. Svetlana thrust it swiftly up her sleeve. Safe in her room, she read it over and over, with joyously beating heart—as though she herself had not sat up, that night, to write it out in a good dozen copies!

Then, sitting at the window, she tried to guess how these leaflets, her own leaflets, had reached the sky.

When her parents came home, that evening, Svetlana silently handed the leaflet to her father. He reached hurriedly for his eyeglasses.

"Dear comrades!" began this message from unknown sources. "Our beloved leader, Comrade Stalin, said in his speech this November 6: 'The German invaders want a war of extermination against the peoples of the U.S.S.R. Well, if the Germans want a war of extermination, they will get it.'"

Opanasenko read these lines three times over, though he had grasped their meaning at once.

"No one could put it like that but Comrade Stalin," he said at length, deeply moved.

When he had read the remaining text, he added:

"I'll take it to work tomorrow, to show the others. Only we'll have to be careful Sasha doesn't see it. A fine boy, I always thought him, yet he

the open-hearth stacks. The very next morning the leaflets came again, fluttering up past the frightened soldiers, like a swarm of bats, out of the darkness of the flue.

Pfaul sent for Smakovskv and Valsky, and went with them to the open-hearth shop. Guessing, at last, where the secret lay, Valsky thrust a sheet of paper into the opening of the flue. A few seconds later, his sheet of paper flew out at the top of the stack. The riddle was solved. Posts were set up outside the stacks as well, beside the shutters. Then the leaflets appeared from the stack of the sintering plant.

Frantic with rage, Pfaul ordered posts established in every stack throughout the works. All the flues were hastily bricked up.

Sasha was upset.

"We've reached the end of our tether," he told Valya glumly. "The Fritzes are airing themselves in all the stacks."

"That was only to be expected," Valya replied. "Now we'll have to start pasting. But the main thing is done: the leaflets are expected, and read. And you know, Sasha, they've got to appear daily. We'll paste them on the inner side of fences, and along the stairways of the big apartment houses."

went to the employment bureau as a volunteer.
Well, my dears, happy holiday!"

And, turning to his wife, he kissed her three times, in the old Russian way—a sudden tenderness that brought the tears to her eyes.

For three days, special watchers scanned the skies until their eyes smarted with weariness. Nothing happened. On the fourth day, leaflets floated down once more. Again the wind was from the East. The watchers were severely reprimanded. The leaflets appeared yet again, and still the watchers could not say where from.

Pfaul was beside himself. Unable to offer any explanation, he could only bleat helplessly into the telephone in response to the regional Kommandant's intricate profanity.

At length, one of the watchers appeared at the Kommandantur and reported that the leaflets came from the end smokestack of the open-hearth shop. Striding up to the soldier, Pfaul sniffed suspiciously. But the man was entirely sober.

The Kommandant ordered an ambush set inside the stack. For several days, the soldiers waited, shivering and cursing in the piercing draft. Then the leaflets appeared again. This time they were seen to issue from the stack of No. 3 furnace. The Kommandant ordered posts set up in all

"It's a shame to lose our air mail system though," said Sasha regretfully. "Especially the stack in the sintering plant. It's a fine stack, the tallest at the works. It's hard to get to, of course, but the draft is so good it pulls your hat off, and you feel as if you'd go flying up yourself in another minute. How on earth those Fritzes stand it. I don't know." He laughed. "After three minutes of it, your teeth begin to chatter like Valsky's used to, down in the slit trench!"

"One thing you've got to keep in mind," Valya told him. "Pasting is much more dangerous. You'll have to pick the very best of the youngsters who copy out the leaflets: the kind that can hold out against anything, in case they're caught."

"There's plenty such. I've got some fine helpers."

"Are you sure you're not overestimating them?"

"Of course! Take Yura, for instance. His radio means more than life to him, now, yet he turned it over to you without a word."

"More than life!" Valya repeated, laughing. "What fine words you've learned to use!"

"Of course it means more," Sasha returned indignantly. "You know what the Germans do if they find a radio. They shoot you on the spot. And just the same, Yura didn't turn his

in, or break it up. Well, and anyway, if any one does break down, nothing terrible can come of it. None of them knows who the others are, so the only one they can give away is me."

Valya looked at him intently.

"In any case," she said, "you'd better leave me their addresses. If anything should happen, I'll take your place."

"Can you hold out, Valya, no matter what they do?" he asked gravely, looking enquiringly into her eyes; and Valya suddenly realized how he had matured.

"Yes, Sasha," she answered, gravely as he had asked. "I'll hold out against anything they can do, and even more."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

One afternoon new hands, caught in a round-up on the market place, were herded into the open-hearth shop. Scanning their gaunt faces, Lutsenko recognized one of the newcomers—a collective farmer from his native village.

"Fedyo!" he called.

The collective farmer looked up glumly. Then recognizing Lutsenko, he came hurrying up.

"Petro! Is it you?"

"Yes, worse luck."

"I'd never have guessed. You're a lath."

"I'll be skinnier, yet. It's only two months and how many more months we still have to wait before the Red Army gets back! How about things out in the village?"

"There isn't any village. They burnt down, the swine. Down to the ground."

"No! And where's my brother?"

"The Germans took him off, the devil knows where to. They shipped everyone in different directions."

"Did his house burn too?"

"I tell you, everything was burnt down to the ground. Nothing left but the chimneys, sticking up like crosses in a cemetery. Even the women and children—they shipped them all off."

Lutsenko hung his head. Year after year, he had spent his vacations in the country, with his brother, invariably turning down the trips to health resorts offered him by the trade union committee. "I'll never believe," he had liked to say, "that any health resort can do a man more good than our folks' collective farm."

The other workers had come up closer, attracted by the conversation.

"What was the trouble over?" Lutsenko asked, his eyes on the ground.

"Well, it was this way. Five days or so, it was, after our troops left, some German came around, with a bunch of soldiers to keep him safe. He appointed a starosta. Vasil Prokopich—remember him? The one that stayed out of the collective farm the longest."

"Yes, I remember him, all right."

"They started peacefully enough: divided up the land, something like ten hectares to a family."

"And you were tickled pink, I suppose, you old dirt-grubber!" put in Lutsenko viciously, glaring at his fellow countryman. "I still remember how you used to say, 'Ekh, if I had some land! Five or six hectares, to hold on to till I die!'"

The collective farmer spat disgustedly.

"You've got a mean memory, Petro," he said. "Those times are dead and buried. And if you think I was tickled, I can tell you things.... What was there to be tickled about? The Germans didn't give us any tractors. They took all our horses. Nothing left but cows—the ones that were hidden properly. What could we do—hitch our dogs to the plough? And anyway, the Germans shot all the dogs. It's a funny thing,

the way the dogs hate those Germans! ¹⁶ The minute they see one, they're like to ^{stop} their chains, they're so wild to get at ^{hit} him. Can there be some instinct tells them a Nazi's a thief?"

"Umph! Get back to the story," Lutsenko put in. "What happened after that?"

"After that? It happened this way. Before the week was out, a whole column of trucks came rolling up. On Saturday, that was. And another German, in a touring car. Shorter than the first one, he was, and broader in the shoulders...."

"Get back to the story, will you," Lutsenko shouted. "What do I care who was shorter, and who was broader? Tell us what happened."

"Well, and they burnt the village down," the collective farmer returned offendedly, and fell silent, seemingly absorbed in contemplation of the huge hole in his boot.

Lutsenko glared at him furiously.

"Stop interrupting, can't you?" demanded Opanasenko, who, like the others, had been listening with interest. "Let the man talk. He's got heartache enough, you can see."

"All right," Lutsenko agreed, more quietly. "Go ahead, then, Fedyo. Only try and keep ^{to} the point."

"Suppose we sit down?" suggested the collective farmer, glancing at a nearby heap of bricks. "My feet ache so, I can hardly stand."

Lutsenko laughed.

"Try it," he said, "if you're anxious to get kicked behind. I'm not going to."

"Do they beat you up here, too, then?"

"What did you think, friend?" demanded Dyatlov. "That they're a different breed, here in town? The Germans are Germans, wherever they go. Fritzes. See?"

Sasha, who had been watching the newcomer steadily, chuckled under his breath.

"Well," the collective farmer continued, "this same Fritz, he stood up in his car and said he was come for grain. Our grain, you see. He wanted us to turn it over. So Vasil Prokopich, being the starosta, he came out and said, 'Look here, Herr. You gave us the land. Of course it was ours anyway, but thanks, just the same, for not taking it away. Only as far as the grain's concerned—it wasn't grown on your land. It was grown on our own, collective, land. When we grow a harvest on your land, why, we'll be very pleased to turn over anything that's due. But the grain we've got now—you have no claim on it. You weren't here when it was sown, nor when it was harvested, either.' That's what our starosta said,

and nothing bad about it. Only that Fritz jumped out of his car like mad, and slashed Vasil Prokopich right across the face with a horsewhip so the blood came spurting. Well, and you know Vasil Prokopich. Contrary as they come. It was contrariness kept him out of the collective farm so long. Contrariness with him, and crankiness with me. There was a pair of us. That whip made him see red, and he caught the Fritz on the ear and sent him flying. And that was when the circus started. They shot Vasil Prokopich on the spot. The people began to run, and the Fritzes let go on the crowd with their automatics. Then they drove us all out in the fields, and set the village on fire from all sides, and shipped everybody off in different directions. I managed to get away but the rest of the folks....”

Sasha jerked Lutsenko’s arm. Lutsenko looked up, and set hastily to work, with a brief command to his fellow countryman:

“Come on, swing that pick!”

The collective farmer stared bewilderedly. Smakovsky was approaching them across the shop, with Lyutov fidgeting around him.

Stopping some distance off, the works manager pushed back his hat and looked the men over with every appearance of disgust.

"Poor work," he said, very loudly.

"The work's as good as the food," came someone's voice, ringing out over the sudden latter of picks and shovels.

"Is there anything wrong with the food?" the works manager enquired.

"Taste it and see," the same voice replied.

Lyutov darted forward, trying to detect the peaker.

"For this sort of work, you'll get no food at all," the manager declared. "And talk like that will land you in concentration camp. It's about time you forgot the old order of things. There's a new order now."

He turned away, and Lyutov scurried to his side.

"That was Lutsenko grumbling," he said, whispering, although they were now too far for the workers to hear him. "It's Opanasenko spoils everything around here." He glanced sidewise, furtively, at the former head foreman, who was carrying two small bricks from one heap to another with obviously exaggerated effort. "He stayed of his own free will. Nobody asked him. And now he won't work himself, and won't let anyone else work either."

Lyutov was determined to gain the post of head foreman, should the works resume opera-

tion; and Opanasenko, as the only other qualified steelman who had remained in town, was a possible rival.

The works manager found only one crew to please his eye; and it was a small one—five men in all. Keeping far apart from the other workers, these five tried their hardest to gain the approval of the authorities. They were workers who had offered their services voluntarily. At first, Valsky had appointed them all foremen. Two days later, however, one of them—the most officious—had been injured by a steel ingot, “accidentally” dropped; and another had been openly threatened. As a result, preferring safety to honours, they had retired to less conspicuous activity.

After watching them for a while, Smakovsky looked in at the dining room. Here the air stank as in a garbage dump, and he turned hurriedly away, with barely a glance at the heaps of half-decayed potato peelings that occupied the larder shelves.

In the barrack assigned as dormitory, he found a hot stove in the corner contending vainly with the cold wind, which poured in relentlessly through glassless windows. A ragged youngster was at work with hammer and nails, trying to stop up the gaping windows with holey sheet iron.

Further, Smakovsky had had it in mind to inspect the power station. In this, however, he did not succeed. The station was guarded by a special SS detail, which bluntly refused him admittance. His documents as works manager made no impression on the commanding officer. Despite all pleas and arguments, the door was slammed in his face.

As soon as Smakovsky and Lyutov were gone, the workers dropped their tools and sat down, on heaps of brick or overturned barrows.

"What do you say we read some newspapers?" Sasha proposed, rolling a dung cigarette.
"What newspapers?" asked Opanasenko.
"The *Donetsky Vestnik*."

Opanasenko glanced at Sasha warily. He had always been fond of the boy, pleased by his spirit and enterprise at work, and even by his unruly ways. Having no son of his own, he had regarded Sasha with feelings close akin to envy. "If I had a boy like that," he had often reflected, "I'd teach him all I know—make a foreman of him in two years! I'd cure his wildness, all right. He's wild because he's got no father. How can a mother keep that kind in hand?" Since the Germans had come, Opanasenko had turned away from Sasha, the "volunteer," with

disgusted hostility; but of late, convinced that the boy kept the workers' talk in the shop strictly to himself, he had begun to regard him with more friendly eyes.

"All right, boy. Read ahead," said Dyatlov. "We'll get hell again if they catch us smoking, but they can't say anything if we're reading that rag. It's their own paper."

"'Genuine Personal Liberty,'" Sasha read out, and paused to clear his throat.

The workers exchanged glances.

"Well, well," said Dyatlov encouragingly. "It certainly does sound interesting!"

"The great German army has brought the Ukrainian people genuine liberation,"" Sasha continued loudly. "'At long last, we can be our own masters, and choose our occupations at will. Anyone is free to establish his own workshop, mill, or factory. Taxes have been abolished. We may forget them to the end of time. The new order is based on the principle of inviolability of private property. This gives full scope to private initiative. Develop commercial activities more energetically! Tradesmen and manufacturers are entitled to high incomes precisely because they are not rank-and-file philistines, but leaders, activists. We may say more: in present conditions, they are great men, vehicles of culture and

civilization. They carry out a noble mission. We already have a number of private stores; but what is holding up our remaining entrepreneurs? True, there is great difficulty in obtaining merchandise. But it must be procured, from the bottom of the sea if necessary....”

“That’s enough of that!” put in Opanasenko. “There’s no deep-sea divers here. We’re ‘rank-and file philistines,’ every one of us. ‘From the bottom of the sea!’” He snorted derisively.

“All right,” said Sasha, laying the paper aside and taking up another. “Let’s try the announcements, then. Here’s a big one: ‘Universal Labour Service for Civilian Population.’”

The announcement was set in very small type, and Sasha had difficulty in making it out in the unlit shop.

“‘I command,’” he read slowly. “‘First: all residents of the “Donetz” Oberfeldkommandantur are liable to labour service, from the age of fourteen. Second: consequently, said residents are obliged to obey any working orders which may be issued by the employment bureau. If so ordered, they are obliged to go to work away from their place of residence. Third: actions violating this order are punishable by fine, imprisonment, confiscation of property, or two or more of these penalties simultaneously.’”

"What do they mean, simultaneously?" demanded the collective farmer, who had seemed half asleep on his pile of bricks. "You can't take two skins off one ox."

Sasha read on:

"Penalty of death may be imposed. Signed, Oberfeldkommandant von Claire, General of Infantry."

Folding up the newspaper, he put it away and produced still another.

"Svetlana's over fifteen," said Opanasenko thoughtfully. "Why, she's still a baby! And here they say—fourteen. Yes, it's nicely put. Page one: personal liberty, and page two—umph!"

The others made no comment. Sasha began a new article.

"In connection with the arrival of Herr land director, the home of the starosta in the village of Petrovka was adorned with the trident—the Ukrainian arms...."

"Hold on! There's no trident in the Ukrainian arms," put in Lutsenko.

"That's the arms of the Ukrainian nationalists," Opanasenko explained.

"Well, why don't they say so, then: nationalist, not Ukrainian. Our Ukrainian arms are the sickle and hammer."

Sasha continued imperturbably:

"...with the trident—the Ukrainian arms—and a portrait of the Führer. Before the trident, on a special elevation, stood a wooden swastika, signifying that the Ukrainian nation belongs to the great Aryan race...."

Opanasenko sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"To the Aryan race? The Ukrainians? They've got another guess coming!"

"Herr land director," Sasha continued, "explained the difference between the old and the new order in the countryside...."

"Drop it!" said Lutsenko. "There's the difference for you, with more holes on than clothes." And he pointed at his fellow countryman, now fast asleep on the bricks.

Sasha broke off. This article had not been marked for reading. He had started it on the spur of the moment, feeling that Lutsenko's fellow countryman offered an excellent object lesson on the new order in the countryside.

Articles and announcements had been selected and numbered in such order as to bring out their glaring contradictions. Valya said she had marked them herself; but the handwriting was not hers. Valya's writing was always neat and small, whereas the articles were numbered in a large, sprawling hand. Sasha asked no questions. He realized

that he was helping the underground Party organization, and this redoubled his spirit and confidence.

"Go on reading, sonny," said the cautious Dyatlov. "If they catch us doing nothing, we'll get no bread again."

"For the Lord's sake," Opanasenko pleaded, "give us a little rest. This stuff is poison. It stinks."

But Sasha, beginning a new article, read inexorably on:

"Model order and cleanliness reign in the camps for Red Army men—prisoners of war. Despite food difficulties, the camp administration provides extra rations for the wounded."

"Wonderful rations," put in Lutsenko. "Three of them jumped out of a third-floor window, yesterday, they were so well-fed."

"I can tell you where their rations come from," said an elderly worker in ragged overalls, who had not said a word in all this time. "They've started a tallow meltery out in our settlement, and they drag in all the carrion they can find—horses, and dogs, and the devil knows what else. There's such a stink in the whole neighbourhood, it's just impossible to stand. The folks even went to the municipal board, to get the place closed down or moved out of town."

But they say—no, private enterprise must be encouraged. Well, and that's where they get the rations for the camp. You have to pinch your nose a mile away. And that's what they're supposed to eat."

He spat disgustedly.

This Sasha had not known. After the article on model conditions in the camp, he had been planning to read an item concerning war prisoners shot down in attempting escape. Now there was no need for this.

Lyutov came in sight, returning from his round of inspection. Dyatlov jerked Sasha's arm, muttering:

"Read, sonny, read."

While Sasha was unfolding a new paper, Lyutov came up and stood waiting, all attention. What were they reading? A leaflet?

There was no time to search for the next numbered article. Sasha began to read the first thing that caught his eye.

"The municipal board reminds all taxpayers that arrears on former state taxes—ground rent, cattle tax, income tax, and tax for cultural development—must be paid immediately.'"

"What do you mean, spreading lies like that," demanded Lyutov. Striding up to Sasha, he wrenched the paper from his hands and tore

it up. "Taxes are done away with for good, I read it myself, in No. 5."

"That was No. 5," Sasha retorted, "and this is No. 10."

"There can't be any collecting of old taxes now. I'll make you stop poisoning people's minds, you little son-of-a-bitch."

Opanasenko laid a heavy hand on Lyutov's shoulder.

"You, meister," he said, "don't you tear that paper. It's the Germans' paper, put out by the new authorities. I can beat you up for that, and never fear. And you'll have the Gestapo to answer to. We're having a talk here all about the new order, and you come interfering."

"But it's lies," Lyutov insisted—more quietly, however. Bending, he began to gather up the torn newspaper.

"What do you mean—lies?" demanded Sasha, growing bolder still. "Here, take another and read for yourself. Only don't tear it this time. Look, this one's about taxes too."

He pointed to one of the announcements in small type.

"Go ahead! Read it out loud!" the workers cried.

Lyutov read rapidly:

"Certain institutions and private individuals

hold the opinion that taxes need no longer be paid. This opinion is erroneous, and liable to severe punishment. Standartkommandant.' "

The workers guffawed. The crestfallen "meister" sat down and ran through the announcement again, this time to himself.

"Keep going, Sasha," Opanasenko commanded. "How can we get on without knowing all the orders of the new authorities?"

Glancing now and again at Lyutov, in open triumph, Sasha read out an order of the army commissary directing that watches and warm clothing be turned in for the use of the German army; an order from the Kommandant levying wagons and carts; an order from the municipal board levying stuffed furniture.

"Here's one you can earn something on," he continued, and read an order from the commander of the "Süd" rear-line territory, levying empty barrels, with a payment of 100 grams of millet per barrel.

"And here's another." Sasha seemed indefatigable. "'The civilian commissary orders the population to turn in articles needed for automobile transport: old tyres, tubes, rubber, rubber overshoes, fats and oils.' "

"Don't they want horse tails too?" asked Lutsenko caustically.

"Hey! Cut the foolishness!" Lyutov shouted.
"Watch what you're saying!"

But Sasha put in:

"Why not? They need horse tails just as much as anything else."

And, after a brief search, he took up one of the papers and read out:

"All special agents are ordered to make the rounds of the households and clip the horses' manes and tails. Tails are to be clipped one handbreadth below the last vertebra. Manes, no more than five centimetres from the root. Land office of the territorial land command."

Through screwed-up eyes, Opanasenko watched the look of growing consternation on the "meister's" face.

Sasha made up his mind to drive the lesson home.

"By the way," he asked, "have you got a cow?"

He knew very well that Lyutov had a cow and calf, which he had brought home from somewhere on his reappearance, the day after the Germans entered the town.

"Yes, but a lot of good it does me. I've nothing to feed it with, and it won't live long," Lyutov replied, in an effort to gain sympathy.

"See you don't let it die," Sasha warned him solicitously. "There's an order about cows in here, too. Anyone who lets their cattle die will be severely punished."

"Too bad for you, meister!" exclaimed Lutsenko, making no effort to conceal his enjoyment. "They'll clip your cow's tail off, and then, if it dies, they'll take both hides—yours, and the cow's."

Springing up, Lyutov shouted:

"Come on, come on, get back to work! You've had enough. Of all the things you pick to read!"

Reluctantly, the workers took up their shovels and barrows.

Sasha usually walked home from work alone. That evening, as he passed through the gates, Opanasenko caught up with him.

"Bring around some more of those papers, sonny," he said. "You know how to read, all right. And why don't you come out to my place, some time? Svetlana gets no company, day in, day out. It's lonely for her. We'll have some tea, and talk things over."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Alexei Ivanovich Pyrin was a reserved and untalkative man. His face, phlegmatically composed—his light, expressionless eyes—his low,